

What is Claimed is:

1. A method for creating a search string using a computer system, the computer system having a processor, a display, and a browser, the computer system programmed with a server-based program called a search builder, the method comprising the steps of:
  - selecting a search topic;
  - defining a plurality of word categories related to the search topic;
  - forming a word group for each word category;
  - populating each word group with a plurality of preselected words within the word category, each of the plurality of words within each word group selected to vary the scope of a search relative to the remaining words in the word group;
  - generating a first search string by selecting a first word from each of a plurality of the word groups to create a search string;
  - transmitting the first search string to a search engine;
  - receiving a first data set from the search engine;
  - creating a second search string by replacing the first word of a first word group of the first search string with second word from the first word group;
  - transmitting the second search string to the search engine; and,
  - receiving a second data set from the search engine.
2. The method of claim 1 wherein the step of selecting a search topic includes the steps of:
  - depicting on the display at least one search topic;
  - the user selecting the search topic from the at least one search topic; and,

responsive to selection by the user of the search topic displaying a plurality of pre-selected word groups.

3. The method of claim 2 wherein the step of generating a first search string
- 5 comprises the steps of:
- displaying a plurality of word group headings to the user;
  - the user selecting a first word group heading;
  - displaying the pre-selected words populating the first word group to the
  - user;
  - 10 the user selecting a first word from the first word group;
  - entering the first word from the first word group into a first search string;
  - displaying the plurality of word group headings to the user;
  - the user selecting a second word group heading from the plurality of
  - displayed word groups;
  - 15 displaying the pre-selected words populating the second word group;
  - the user selecting a first word from the second word group; and,
  - adding the first word from the second word group to the first search string.
4. The search builder display method described in claim 1 wherein the
- 20 visual cue includes displaying the search word types in selected color codes and in text.
5. The search builder display method described in claim 4 where the step of displaying the word types includes displaying standardized terms identifying each word

type, the terms selected from the group consisting of a subject, action, feature, knowledge, location, date and domain.

6. The search builder display method described in claim 4 wherein the  
5 visual cue includes displaying the search groups color coded to the word types.

7. The search builder display method described in claim 1 wherein the step  
of displaying the pre-selected words in a group to the user includes displaying pre-  
arranged controlled vocabulary drop down menus for each word group.

10

8. The search builder display method described in claim 1 wherein the step  
of entering the first word from the first word group includes displaying the first word in  
a text box and in the display associated with the word group.

15 9. The search builder display method described in claim 1 wherein the step  
of selecting a first word from the first word group includes selecting an accept button  
which enters the first word into a search string.

10. The search builder display method described in claim 1 which further  
20 comprises the step of displaying a clear button which when clicked deletes words in the  
text box.

11. The search builder display method described in claim 1 which further  
comprises the step of displaying a selected search word includes displaying the selected

search word in a sequence of words color coded to correspond to the word group from which the selected search word was selected.

12. The search builder display method according to claim 1 further comprises  
5 displaying a topics button that when selected displays a list of the available search topics.

13. The search builder display method described in claim 1 which further  
comprises the step of displaying a search button which when clicked displays a color  
10 coded search string comprised of at least one selected word and a list of pre-selected search engines or searchable databases.

14. The search builder display method described in claim 1 which further  
comprises the step of displaying a clear and start over button which when selected  
15 displays a list of pre-arranged search engines or searchable databases.

15. The search builder display method described in claim 1 which further  
comprises displaying a Save Search button which when selected saves a search string  
builder configuration and search word query.

20

16. The search builder display method described in claim 15 which further  
comprises displaying a Load Last Saved Search button and a text box containing Saved  
Searches, the Load Last Search button operable to enter a saved search word query into  
a text box.

17. A computer implemented method of searching the world wide web comprising the steps of:

- selecting a topic to be searched;
- 5 creating a hierarchical search string comprising an ordered series of search words, one search word selected from at least one of a plurality of pre-selected, ordered controlled vocabulary word groups;
- transmitting the ordered search string to a search engine; and,
- receiving a first set of search results.

10

18. A method of offering search services for searching the world wide web comprising the steps of:

- providing a web site accessible through the world wide web;
- providing access through the web site to a data base of files accessible
- 15 through the world wide web;
- providing a category of search that can be conducted through the web site;
- for each search category providing a plurality of word groups from which to assemble a hierarchical search string;
- 20 cueing a remote user to construct a hierarchical search string by sequentially displaying a plurality of categorical word groups, the user selecting a first word from at least one of the displayed word groups;
- transmitting the search string to a search engine; and,
- receiving and displaying a first search result to the user.